

Opposition accuses Reynolds of being partisan

Reynolds says no investigation needed into 2001 byelection

BY DAVE BARTLETT dbartlett@thetelegram.com



THE TELEGRAM

Liberal justice critic Kelvin Parsons says the province's chief electoral officer is showing his political colours by not investigating the 2001 byelection in St. Barbe.

Paul Reynolds — the current head of the provincial office that oversees elections — was PC party president for two years in 1980s.

In an agreed statement of facts in provincial court in the case of former Tory cabinet minister Ed Byrne, it was revealed that PC organizer Wayne Clarke received \$3,000 from Byrne's constituency allowance while working on the byelection.

Tory MHA Wally Young won that byelection by 23 votes, and has since been re-elected twice.

Parsons says politics aside, Reynolds has no choice but to investigate.

"I think it's an absolute failure on Mr. Reynolds' part to do his job as he is required to do under the Elections Act," he says.

"We all know that Paul Reynolds is a PC political crony — we pointed that out when he was appointed," Parsons continued.

"Not to do an investigation only adds to the suspicions that we already had in the first place that he was not the proper appointee."

Parsons says Reynolds can't decide if anything nefarious happened during the byelection without a full investigation.

"The public have a right to know when public money is used in the election process, whether those funds were used appropriately," he says.

NDP Leader Lorraine Michael agrees.

But she also says people with any strong political connections shouldn't hold the post of chief electoral officer.

"I can't say it plays a role in this situation. What I do believe though, is that because of his past history, (Reynolds) leaves himself open for interpretation," says Michael.

Michael says she told the House of Assembly in the spring of 2007, when Reynolds was appointed, that it could open the door to a perception of bias.

She says the same can be said about Reynolds' predecessor, Chuck Furey, who was a well-known Liberal, though he was also appointed by Premier Danny Williams.

According to Section 273 of the province's Elections Act, the chief electoral officer "may conduct an audit of the accounts of a registered party or candidate where he or she considers it necessary to do so."

Both Michael and Parsons agree there is a clear violation of the Elections Act in this case which forces Reynolds to act.

Earlier this week, Michael told CBC news that Reynolds should resign if he won't investigate.

Parsons takes it one step further. He says if Reynolds won't investigate, the House of Assembly should remove him from the job and proceed with an independent investigation of the byelection.

Neither Parsons nor Michael would speculate whether more charges could be laid if an investigation is conducted.

Reynolds told The Telegram he is not considering a formal investigation.

He says he's done a review of the election expenditures and there's no indication that either the PC party, campaign workers or Young knew what Byrne had done.

And he says Byrne has already been convicted for his part.

Reynolds says even with the \$3,000, Young was well within his expense limit for the election, and the Elections Act allows campaign workers to be paid and reimbursed for their expenses.

As for Parsons' allegations that he is a "political crony," Reynolds says that's not true.

"When I was appointed two years ago, I left my political affiliations behind me and I took on the role of the chief electoral officer and I do it in a fair and impartial manner," he says.